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A Danubian Confederation of the Future

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WAR has always strongly impressed the imagination of man. It has inspired poets, seers and thinkers. But of all inspirations by the war, the most appealing to me are those that are a negation of the war,—thus, in the final inspiration in the Mahabarata, the great Indian war poem, when the old King Dritirastra in a vision saw all the warriors that fell on the fatal battlefield of Kukureshtra rising from the Ganges, friends and foes reconciled, all resplendent in youth and glory.

Technically we are still at war and all men of good-will are thinking how to get out of war, how to make peace, not a temporary one, but a lasting peace based upon solid foundation.

Two great aggressive empires, Russia and Austria-Hungary, have passed away and upon their ruins, new states have sprung up, full of life, with new interests and a new outlook. The Balkans, that is what the politicians used to call the Balkans, have disappeared also. Only Bulgaria will remain a purely Balkan state. All other Balkan nations will have their future interests mainly outside the confines of the Balkan peninsula. Greece will extend to Asia Minor and look for the penetration of those vast territories which for some time were the dependencies of Hellenic civilization and later on were the stronghold of Byzantium. Serbia and Montenegro have ceased as independent states and have merged themselves into a larger national commonwealth of Jugoslavia, now officially called the kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. With its territories on the left banks of the Rivers Save and Danube, that kingdom has extended beyond the Balkan peninsula, and, with its Alpine provinces, it belongs now to central Europe. Rumania also has altogether ceased to be a Balkan state, having annexed Bessarabia and Transylvania. Constantinople and the Straits surely will pass under an international control, and Albania will be tutored by a power or a league of powers from outside the Balkans. Moreover, the former

Balkan states, Rumania and Serbia, having nothing more to fear from Austria-Hungary, will turn to the north where instead of enemies they will find friends and natural allies in Czecho-Slovakia and Magyaria, the Magyar national state. Both these states, like Rumania and Serbia, must be creations of the Peace Conference at Versailles.

Since men or nations cannot be treated independently from their environments, it is necessary to draw attention to one strong feature of those countries. The fact should be emphasized that the Balkan peninsula, unlike the two other great European peninsulas, the Apenine and the Pyrenean, is not a geographical entity separated from the rest of the continent by a high and well marked chain of mountains. The Balkans are geographically an integral part of central Europe. The greatest European river, the Danube, is a common life-artery for all those countries. All the Bosnian and Serbian valleys open to the north and central Europe. This geographical fact may serve as an additional explanation of the causes of the present war and as a suggestion of what ought to be a sound policy of the new states of that part of Europe.

At the present moment the dominating desire of all those peoples is the achievement of complete national independence. The nations of southeastern Europe are longing for freedom, as freedom has been so long denied to them. Without the satisfaction of that demand no step forward can be made in the reconstruction of that stormy corner of Europe. We assume here that that demand will be fully satisfied, as Czecho-Slovakia and Jugoslavia base their aspirations upon victory achieved as well as upon the fourteen points of President Wilson.

There are many reasons, historic, national and economic which prompt the Czecho-Slovaks, the Jugoslavs and the Rumanians to remain good allies in the future and work out a scheme for close coöperation. The Jugoslavs and the Rumanians have lived as neighbors for more than a thousand years, but their history has never chronicled a conflict between them. They had the same sources of civilization, the Greek Christianity; they had the same enemies, the Bulgars, Magyars and the Turks. They shared the same destiny, being for centuries under the Turkish yoke, and were suffering from Magyar oligarchy. Together they shook off

Turkish rule and together in a world conflict they have now achieved the freedom and the unity of their race. All their past and present points to their mutual understanding in the future, as their interests nowhere clash.

The same is true of the Czecho-Slovaks. They and the Jugoslavs are of the same Slavic origin. Their languages even today represent a strong bond of unity. The Slovak dialect of the Czech tongue is so near to the Serbo-Croatian language that there is a dispute among the scientists whether the Slovak idiom should be classified into the group of the Jugoslav or into that of the Western Slav languages, to which belong the Czech, the Polish and certain other idioms. They also have drawn upon the same sources of civilization. In the tenth century the Slav apostles, Cyril and Methodius, translated the Gospels from the Greek into the Jugoslav language as was spoken in Macedonia. They went preaching the Gospel and strengthening Christianity among the Bulgarians, Jugoslavs and Czecho-Slovaks. Therefore, they are equally venerated by each one of those peoples. By the invasion of the Magyars, in the ninth century, the Czecho-Slovaks and Jugoslavs became separated territorially. Nevertheless, the bond of friendship and cultural ties never ceased to exist between them.

The similarity of their history is so great that one is rather tempted to look at it as a history of one and the same nation, forcibly separated into two physical parts, but whose inner life by a miracle remained the same. The Magyars subjugated the Slovaks in the north as well as the Croats in the south, whereas Bohemia and Serbia, as the main parts of their respective nations continued their independence and attained a remarkable degree of prosperity and civilization in the Middle Ages. The Turkish invasion worked upon them very similarly. After a prolonged struggle, Serbia succumbed to the Turks. Bohemia, fearing Turkish menace, in order to avoid the fate of Serbia, allied herself with Austria. But the result proved the same. The bad faith of the German dynasty of Hapsburg was an evil equal to the sword of Janissaries. Bohemia lost her independence and during long centuries, like Serbia, sank into misery and oblivion.

But there was a fire smouldering beneath the ashes. In the nineteenth century, after the great commotion created by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, the national life of

both the Jugoslavs and Czecho-Slovaks was revived in literature and at the same time the nucleus of the present Jugoslavia was created in an autonomous Serbia out of the Turkish Vilayet of Belgrade. Since that time they both have progressed apace and in the same lines. The Czechs helped every national movement among the Jugoslavs and the latter always sided with the Czechs in their common struggle against the Germans and the Magyars. When, in 1848, the Germans of Bohemia took part in the Pan-German Congress at Frankfort, the Czechs proclaimed the solidarity of the Slavs by summoning a Pan-Slav Congress at Prague where the centuries old friendship between the Czecho-Slavs and Jugoslavs was strongly manifested and fortified by new coöperation. When in 1866 Austria became Austria-Hungary, the Czecho-Slovaks and the Jugoslavs met one and the same fate. To them were denied the rights of ancient, independent states. Both of them were cunningly divided in Austria and Hungary and their national resources were recklessly exploited for the promotion of schemes directly opposed to their national welfare. The last war was a culmination of long endured iniquities. Their masters exacted from them the heaviest sacrifices in order to make their chains stronger. Both of them, the Czecho-Slovaks and the Jugoslavs, were compelled to fight German battles. They both resisted that plan admirably. There has been no written treaty of alliance between them, but it is difficult to find any other instance in history of a closer coöperation and a more perfect confidence between two nations. Their policy sprang up simultaneously, dictated by the masses of the people whose heart felt instantaneously the whole meaning of the last world struggle. President T. Masaryk once said to me at London:

My policy was clearly revealed to me by the action of the Czecho-Slovak soldiers who, without awaiting upon any concert of their leaders, surrendered to the Allies in Serbia and Russia and immediately formed their own regiments to fight the central Empires. The same was done by the Jugoslavs. We, their leaders, had nothing to do but to follow and explain that policy to the Allies.

The same was done at home. Their recognized leaders were imprisoned, sentenced and executed by brutal masters. But in spite of everything their resistance grew and the mysterious coöperation among their national masses became closer with every day as war dragged on. Their deputies in the Vienna Parliament

proceeded with common accord. They denounced boldly the policy of the Central Empires. They preached and organized open revolt, which brought about the collapse of Austria-Hungary from within as much as it was due to the pressure from without. The Peace Conference will do justice to their bravery, and the brotherhood of arms between the Czecho-Slovaks and the Jugoslavs will be consecrated by a solemn international action by which both will be admitted into the society of nations as free, independent members.

They were true allies in the past; they are now; and they will continue to be in the future. There are ties stronger than any written treaty. The fear of a new German invasion by armed or by economic ways will dictate to them an agreement for the defense of their political and economic freedom. As in politics, so in economics they are mutually interdependent. Czecho-Slovakia can hardly find a better market for her manufactured goods than Jugoslavia. The latter being an agricultural country will have in Czecho-Slovakia, the nearest customer for her raw products. The Czechs will be the first to be interested in the development of the great natural resources of Jugoslavia.

With some difference of details, the same can be said for the past and future relations between Rumania and Czecho-Slovakia. Through the latter, Rumania and Jugoslavia can reach most easily northern and western Europe. Through Rumania, both of the others can be brought in contact with the rich countries on the shores of the Black Sea. Jugoslavia offers to Rumania and Czecho-Slovakia her fine Adriatic ports and Salonica which opens for them the wealth of the Indies and the East. As there was nothing dividing them in the past, so there is everything pointing to their coöperation in the future.

But all three of them, Jugoslavia, Rumania and Czecho-Slovakia, will stumble over Magyaria. The Magyars are a deep wedge, and for centuries were a stumbling block for the coöperation of nations in that part of Europe. Like a whirlwind from Asia they overran Russia and the Carpathians and settled down on the fertile plains on the banks of the Danube and the Tissa. Being a military organized camp, like all Mongolian tribes, they conquered easily the rather meek Slavic tribes and pushed them north into the mountains and beyond large rivers in the south.

After a thousand years of their European home, the Magyars have kept very much of their fiery, ardent, self-assertive Asiatic character. Through centuries the initial principle of their life—lust for conquest and sheer denial of any rights to their opponents—has manifested itself repeatedly. They conquered the Slavs, but they could never subdue them entirely. Weak as aggressors, the Slavs are very strong in their passive resistance. In the mountains, in the marshy plains, they kept their character and their faith, and after every apparent defeat, they came back stronger.

The thousand years of their past history, culminating in the struggle just ended, should have brought home a great lesson to each of them. The Slavs ought to recognize frankly the fact that the Magyars cannot be dislodged from their position. The Magyars should give up the eternal game of dominating the Slavs. Let them meet on a basis of equality and confidence. Let them consider their future relations in the light of the great modern principle, that no nation can live in itself, for itself and by itself. The old principle of exclusion and competition is to be replaced by the new one of trust and coöperation.

When the crust of old prejudices falls from their eyes, they will see how much of their past has been an awful misunderstanding, how, instead of irreconcilable antagonists, they are the most natural allies. The Magyars will see how their exclusiveness and self-assertion brought only misery to themselves and to their Slav neighbors. The Magyars' denial of Slav freedom undermined the real basis of their own liberty. In order to subjugate Slavs, they became slaves themselves and the overseers of German slaves. They will remember that the brightest and greatest phase of Magyar history was the time of King Mathius Corvinus, a sincere friend and ally of the Slavs. Never since has Magyar national genius shone so brightly as when it was coöperating with its Slav neighbors.

The Germans who invented and spread the teaching about an imaginary Slav danger, whilst preparing the conquest of the world for themselves, poured the poison into the Magyar ears that they were a super-race destined to rule. Of course the Germans gave them only the empty shell and kept the meat for themselves. What has been the result? The Magyar's professions of liberty degenerated into a cynic oppression of non-Magyar races and an

uncontested rule of Magyar junkers over Magyar masses. The fertile plain of Alföld saw with every day an increase of emigration of the Magyar peasantry overburdened by a medieval economic system and political corruption of the crudest form. The Magyar "super-race" after a very short and brilliant period of national literature and art during the struggle for independence of 1848, produced nothing that could win an international recognition. Their art and literature became a pale reflex of the cheap products of German mind of the last fifty years. Their only international "success" was the regilding of their aristocratic coat-of-arms by marriage with eccentric dollar princesses. Whereas the Magyar spiritual life sank to stale mediocrities, the oppressed Slavs exerted themselves vigorously in art, science and literature. The Czecho-Slovaks gave to the world a Dvořák, a Smetana, a Vrhlicki, a Masaryk. The power of the Jugoslav genius was revealed by the beauty of their national poetry and of their music and won the most honorable place in science through Tesla and Pupin, and in the plastic art through Meštrović, now unanimously recognized as the leading sculptor of the world.

If those people of southeastern Europe were to follow the teachings of Berlin, of Vienna or of Budapest they would in the good old way dismember Hungary and boast that this Mongolian dragon has been smashed and disposed of once and for all. And I should not say that such tendencies do not exist. The Balkan nations have for so long a time been tutored by Vienna and Budapest, that they cannot easily rid themselves of the ways of their former masters. But it would not be the Balkanization of the central Europe, it would be Vienneizing or Budapestizing it.

Fifty years ago, Count Andrassy returned from the Congress of Berlin to Budapest where he was treated like a great conqueror and far-sighted statesman. In the Hungarian Parliament and the fashionable clubs of Budapest, before gentlemen with diamond studs in their white shirts, he said boastfully that he was able to obtain for Austria-Hungary, not only the occupation of Bosnia but also the military administration of the Sanjak of Novi-Bazar. "Thus gentlemen," Count Andrassy boasted, "the Slav hydra has been smashed, the union of Serbia and Montenegro has been prevented, and the Magyars control the road to Salonica."

Life sometimes reserves strange surprises and revenges. The

would-be victorious Magyars were every day losing ground on that very field that only counts in the long run, the field of spiritual and moral achievements. Whereas the subjugated Slavs with every year made a new conquest on the way of true freedom and greatness. Thus the whole teaching of their history is giving them a serious warning on the threshold of a new era that is to dawn on Europe as a price of so much bravery and suffering. The sooner they bury the hatchet of past feuds the better for themselves and humanity. In order to enter the new life of promises the Magyars must be cured of the ridiculous pretension of a super-race which happily never was the religion of Magyar masses. At the bottom of Magyaro-Slavs relations, in spite of German insinuations and fatal misunderstandings, there remained always a feeling of respect and admiration. The plastic, elusive, imaginative Slav soul was a match to the ardent, fiery, somehow sombre Magyar mind. Temperamentally, they complement each other and if fused in a happy partnership can produce great and lasting things. The Slavs believe in their mission, but that mission never was that which the Germans taught about the Pan-Slavism. The Slavs believe in reconciliation and not in opposition. Against the German ideal of violence and pride, they set up their ideal of love and Christian humility. It consists not in compelling other nations to accept their outlook on life, but in sympathy for other nations' ideals.

The Slavs and the Magyars can enter the new life with old prejudices, petty jealousies, mean bickerings and eternal friction; or they can make their common life vaster, more beautiful and nobler through sincere reconciliation and coöperation. The Slavs do recognize the value of the Magyars; they are a desirable partner, but they must not be pressed into that partnership, they must be attracted. We may hope that the Magyars are ready for the change of attitude. The junkerism which heaped only misery and reproaches upon the Magyars is now defeated. Some of the Magyars could already see upon the Slav banners, the slogan "for our and your liberty." The Magyar democracy must feel friendly towards such instinctively democratic people as the Slavs. The self-evidence of so many common interests between them will do the rest.

The Magyar government headed by Count Karolyi made a

vain and very belated plea that the geographical frontiers of Hungary should be preserved, that the Magyars were ready to grant the complete national autonomy to Serbs, Slovaks and Rumanians comprised in those boundaries. The Peace Conference cannot and should not respond to it. This plea and offer are a survival of the old pre-war Magyar ideology. The nationalities of Hungary already possess their autonomy of will, and intend to settle their political status according to their own interests and aspirations. The Magyars have nothing to grant them. The nations of southeastern Europe demand above everything freedom and unity. No economic, geographical or strategical considerations can stand in the way of that. The future coöperation of those nations can be attained only through freedom and in freedom. The Magyars must recognize and reconcile themselves to these facts if they desire to enjoy the advantages of a coöperation.

The most necessary and desirable factors for coöperation with the Magyars are at hand. Not one of those nations is powerful enough to menace the independence of another. Czecho-Slovakia with strong German minorities will number about twelve millions; Magyaria with strong German and other minorities about ten millions; Jugoslavia about twelve millions and Rumania about twelve millions. Not one of these countries is economically self-sufficient. But united in a loose political and a strong economic confederation, they will command natural resources greater than any other European country. Rumania possesses oil wells and salt mines, the richest in Europe. Jugoslavia has an abundance of coal, copper, iron, and together with Bohemia is one of the wealthiest mining countries of the world. Jugoslavia, as well as the Carpathian mountains, has an abundance of forests and their timber industries will come next to Russia. Rumanian, Magyar and Jugoslav plains are the richest granaries of Europe. The vineyards of Hungary and Jugoslavia are equal to the best French vineyards. Jugoslavia enjoys the finest climate for fruit growing and cattle raising; Hungary for horse breeding. Czecho-Slovakia already possesses many industries. The skill and organizing capacities of the Czechs stand among the first in Europe.

A Danubian confederation represented by such gifted nations

as Latins, Slavs and Magyars, could evolve a civilization whose brilliancy might easily surpass anything attained until now in Europe. Materially and geographically it could be envied by many other countries. In variety and beauty of its scenery, in the richness of its soil, in the extent of its frontiers for the increase of population, in the navigability of its rivers, in the safety, size and beauty of its seaports—that confederation would be better provided than any other European country. Its geographical position which, heretofore, presented many disadvantages, such as being on a high road connecting East and West and open to all invasions and conquests, should in the new era of peace be turned to greatest advantage.

The Danube in connecting all these countries offers not only the cheapest route for an internal exchange of goods, but opens to them the access to the rich countries around and beyond the Black Sea. The Adriatic ports give them the access to the civilized West. Moreover, nature has provided through the Balkans the nearest and easiest access to Salonica. That port, the largest and safest in the Mediterranean, is the key of the fabulous riches of the East. The Ægean Sea is connected now by a railway line with Prague, Budapest, Belgrade, Skoplje and Salonica, but could be reached also by a navigable water way which was under consideration before the last war. The Danube is navigable and so are many of its tributaries in Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary and Jugoslavia. But its navigation presents some difficulties at the Iron Gates and at Sulina. Those difficulties can, however, be avoided and the way to Salonica considerably shortened by a canal to be built from Smederevo in Serbia using the courses of the Morava and the Vardar rivers. Now there is no watershed between the Morava and the Vardar. The waters from a plateau near Kumanovo in Serbia run indifferently to the Danube or to the Vardar which empties in the Gulf of Salonica. The water way from Brunn in Bohemia or from Budapest or from Belgrade to Smyrna or to the Suez Canal or to any port of the Mediterranean can be made shorter by 600 nautical miles than the existing way along the Danube and through the Straits. The Hungarian government before the war had under consideration a costly and difficult scheme to connect Fiume with the River Save by a canal. It would require costly boring of a mountain range which would be

superfluous if the project of a cheaper canal to Salonica were to be executed. That water way can be easily prolonged by a system of rivers and canals to the Baltic. Thus from Danzig, the Vistula is navigable all through Russian Poland. Further up, the Vistula can be canalized and connected with the River March in Czecho-Slovakia which empties in the Danube near Pressburg. From there the Danube carries us to Smederevo, then the Morava and the Vardar through Serbia will bring us to Salonica. This navigable water way all through the countries independent of Germany would offer to all Baltic countries a sure water way to Suez shorter by 2,000 miles than the route now existing all around Europe. This water way would only emphasize the political and economic importance of a Danubian confederation.

The readers can see that such a confederation is not a beautiful dream of dreamers, but a practical and a most advantageous solution of future problems in southeastern Europe. It must not and cannot be realized by force but by enlightenment and free will of all the peoples concerned. For the present moment the whole question hinges upon the attitude of the Magyars after the signing of the world peace. It can be put thus: Will they continue to be a wedge or will they become a link between the neighboring nations?

What will be the policy of those nations depends upon what will be their philosophy, since the policy of a nation is the practical application of its philosophy. The Danubian peoples, in fact all the nations of Europe, are in need of a new philosophy. They look to America for this. Is there something ironically tragic in this looking? Will, or can America seize this opportunity to become the teacher for the nations of a philosophy of reconciliation and contentment?